

Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Like all forms of child sexual abuse, CSE:

- can affect any child/young person **male or female** under the age of **18 years**
- can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual
- can include both contact (penetrative & non-penetrative) and non-contact sexual activity
- can take place in person or via technology, or both
- can involve force and/or enticement, and may or may not include violence/threats of violence
- may occur without the child/young person's immediate knowledge e.g. through copying and/or posting on social media of images/videos created
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, children or adults
- can be 'one-off', a series of incidents, opportunistic, and/or complex organised abuse
- is typified by a power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse that could be due factors such as age, gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and/or access to economic or other resources

Remember, child sexual exploitation can occur without any of the warning signs or risk indicators outlined below being obviously present.

The presence of these indicators may be explained by other forms of vulnerability rather than child sexual exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation is never the victim's fault

Key guidance:

For more information go to: [Child sexual exploitation: definition and a guide for practitioners, DfE 2017](#)

One of the key factors of CSE is the presence of some form of exchange (e.g. sexual activity in return for something).

For the victim, this may be tangible, such as money, drugs or alcohol and/or intangible rewards such as status, protection or perceived receipt of love or affection.

It could also be for the prevention of something negative e.g. a child or young person who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm their family.

As this exchange occurs within an unequal power dynamic, the receipt of something by a child or young person does not make them any less of a victim.

Consent cannot be given, even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them.

Your safeguarding duty to protect and support does not depend on the child or young person's desire to be safeguarded.

Further information & resources:

- [Sheffield Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures: SSCB fact sheet and guidance](#)
- [NSPCC](#): definitions, statistics, facts and resources about Child Sexual Exploitation
- [PACE](#): is a national charity working with parents & carers whose children are sexually exploited
- [Thinkuknow](#): advice for staff, parents, children and young people about online abuse
- [Barnardo's](#): advice for parents, professionals and young people on the signs of sexual exploitation and how to keep safe
- [Child sexual exploitation: definition and a guide for practitioners, DfE 2017](#)



Vulnerabilities:

ALL children and young people, including those from supportive families can be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. However, some children and young people are known to be at greater risk if they:

- have a prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- lack or have lacked a safe & stable home environment e.g. experiencing domestic violence, parental substance misuse, mental health issues, criminal activity
- have experienced recent bereavement or loss
- experience social isolation or social difficulties
- do not have a safe environment to explore sexuality
- are economically vulnerable
- are homeless or are in insecure accommodation
- have connections with other children and young people who are being sexually exploited
- have family members or other connections involved in adult sex work
- have a physical or learning disability
- are in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories)
- are exploring their sexual identity

Warning signs:

Potential indicators of risk that a child or young person may be being sexually exploited include:

- acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones etc. without plausible explanation
- gang association and/or isolation from peers & social networks
- exclusion or unexplained absences from school, college or work
- leaving home or care without explanation and persistently going missing or returning late
- excessive receipt of texts & phone calls
- returning home under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour or sexually transmitted infections for age
- evidence or suspicions of physical or sexual assault
- relationships with controlling or significantly older individuals or groups
- multiple callers (unknown adults or peers)
- frequenting areas known for sex work
- concerning use of internet or other social media
- increasing secretiveness around behaviours
- self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being

What to do next:

Any member of staff who suspects or receives information that a child or young person **may be** involved in sexual exploitation, including suspicion that they are being groomed or exploited online, should refer their concerns to their Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy, who will refer the matter to Children's Social Care.

Children's Social Care will initiate a child protection enquiry and contact the Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service to consider convening a Sexual Exploitation Meeting based on the indicators of risks.

If there are concerns about the involvement of a person who:

- works with children, and/or
- is in a 'Position of Trust'

...the **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** should be informed, via a [LADO Request form](#)

Where appropriate, the child or young person's wishes and feelings, as well as those of their parents and carers should be sought and taken into consideration when deciding how to proceed.

However, practitioners should be aware that this may not always be in the child or young person's best interest and may put them at further risk of harm.

Some children or young people may have been trafficked and need support to access services.

[The National Referral Mechanism](#) (NRM) is the framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.



Governors, Management Committees and the senior management of all education settings need to make clear their commitment to deal effectively with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

All education settings should ensure that:

- they identify to staff & students a [trained](#) and regularly updated **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Lead**
- the CSE Lead & the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) (if they are different people) work closely together
- all staff are made aware of and understand CSE indicators and referral pathways
- pupils/students are taught (age-appropriately) about:
 - CSE and how to protect themselves and each other
 - Healthy (including sexual) relationships, peer pressure, bullying, online-safety, gang activity etc. and how these topics can relate to CSE
- pupils/students know who to go to for help and support, and who to report CSE concerns to, both inside and outside the education setting
- relevant staff work in partnership with other agencies
- procedures are in place to continually gather, record and share CSE information with the Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service as soon as practicable, including ongoing data on Pupils/students who run away or go missing
- they consider effective ways of raising awareness of CSE with parents and carers

Educating children and young people – some important principles:

- **The need for early and continuous education:** Children and young people need to be educated about the risk of child sexual exploitation (and other forms of sexual abuse) before perpetrators approach them. Schools and colleges may want to consider how to build in effective, age-appropriate education, which sensitively supports younger children on these issues and which forms part of a planned programme of study across key stages. This should be accompanied by wider resilience-building work.
- **Use all potential avenues of communication:** Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons are an obvious route for educating children and young people about the risks of child sexual exploitation and other forms of harm, as are pastoral services and school nurse services. Consideration should also be given to how messages can be delivered outside mainstream education, for example, in youth clubs, community settings or the family home.
- **Adopt a holistic approach:** Risk of child sexual exploitation should be addressed as part of a wider programme of work on sexuality and sexual development, choice and consent, healthy relationships, harmful social norms and abusive behaviours and online safety. This should build on existing initiatives (around online safety for example) and ensure messages dovetail across these different programmes of work. Educative work should engage both boys and girls and should address both risk of perpetration and risk of victimisation (and the potential for overlap).
- **Contextual considerations:** Messages around child sexual exploitation should be delivered within a safe non-judgmental environment, by credible individuals who are confident discussing the issues and able to challenge unhelpful perceptions. Where specific vulnerabilities are identified (going missing, gang-association or drug/alcohol misuse, for example) more targeted educative work should be undertaken, while taking care to avoid stigmatisation or labelling. Accessible and appropriate support should be immediately available should any issues of concern be identified during education activity.